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FM AMEMBASSY DHAKA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6259
INFO RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 7363
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1041
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 8452
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1411
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 8971
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 0237
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1027
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
RUEHIN/AIT TAIPEI 0063
RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHDC

UNCLAS DHAKA 001528

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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CORRECTED COPY -- PARAS RENUMBERED

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: ELAB ETRD PGOV BG

SUBJECT: FACTORIES COLLAPSE AND BURN; EXPERTS HOLD MEETING;
ACTUAL DEAD POSSIBLY HIGHER

¶1. (SBU) On March 14, in the wake of the Phoenix factory collapse in Dhaka which killed 21 and injured 50, and of the KTS factory fire in Chittagong which killed at least 61 and injured over a 100, and the Radiant Sweater company fire which killed 3 and injured 22, the Center for Policy Dialogue (CPD) think tank sponsored a public forum to discuss "Workplace Safety for the Industrial Worker: Can We Do Anything?" Laboff attended to hear the views of representatives from civil society, factory owners, labor, and government.

¶2. (SBU) CPD Executive Director Deb Bhattacharya began by telling the over 100 attendees that changing the present situation does not mean a "big investment" but a change in government and factory owners' "attitudes." He charged that political figures only show care for workers for the TV cameras, that injured workers and the families of dead workers remain uncompensated, that the Ministry of Labor is unresponsive, that no organization is keeping reliable statistics, codes or conduct are not universally being used, and trade unions are not working hard enough for the workers.

¶3. (SBU) Various representatives defended their sectors: trade unionists said that laws were not sufficient, that factories rarely have sufficient safety equipment. A representative from the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) defended his members' factories as safe, rhetorically asking, "Why would we want to lose our investment?" Deputy Director of Labor Kabir Ahmed Choudhury complained that their inspection unit needs more employees.

¶4. (SBU) Newspaper reports commenting on the three factory disasters put the total deaths from these disasters at over 140, with the injured at over 500. Many people believe the actual totals are much higher. The country representative for American Center International Labor Solidarity (ACILS) told laboff that in the Phoenix factory collapse, the police blocked access to people, citing safety concerns, but he believed they blocked access to conceal the actual number of dead being retrieved from the site. Bangladeshis argued that the English language press never showed front page photos of the dead, while the Bangla language dailies prominently displayed several bloodied bodies recovered from the disaster sites.

¶5. (U) Note: We will report septel workers' accounts of the
KTS Textile factory fire.
CHAMMAS